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Dear Permission to be Powerful Reader,

A hush fell over the packed federal courtroom as Judge Arun Subramanian gavelled in the start of

Sean “Diddy” Combs’s long-awaited trial on sex trafficking and racketeering charges.

Combs, dressed in a white sweater, had earlier flashed a thumbs-up to family members in the gallery...

But now he sat at the defense table flanked by his attorneys, face set in concentration^{[1](#)}.

Twelve jurors looked on, sworn to impartially weigh the explosive claims ahead.

In opening statements on Monday, prosecutors immediately painted the music mogul as a brutal predator who terrorized ex-girlfriends...

While the defense countered that the 55-year-old superstar’s accusers were willing participants – “capable, strong adult women” drawn into consensual relationships^{[2](#)}.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Emily Johnson rose first for the prosecution, stepping before the jury with a stern gaze.

She extended an arm toward the defendant...

“This is Sean Combs,”

Johnson declared, her voice echoing as Combs leaned back in his chair. ^{[3](#)}

“To the public,” she said, “he was known as Puff Daddy or Diddy – a cultural icon, savvy businessman,

“Larger than life.”

“But,” Johnson continued, “there was another Sean Combs hidden behind the fame.”

“There was another side to him – a side that ran a criminal enterprise,”

...She announced, cutting through the silence^{[4](#)}.

“For 20 years, the defendant, with the help of his trusted inner circle, committed crime after crime. That’s why we’re here today. That’s what this case is about.”^{[5](#)}

Johnson methodically sketched a portrait of an abusive empire allegedly orchestrated by Combs over two decades^{[6](#)}.

Jurors heard a litany of crimes that the government intends to prove: kidnapping, arson, drug trafficking, sex crimes, bribery, and obstruction of justice^{[7](#)}.

Many of these acts, Johnson said, were not committed by Combs alone –

He had an “inner circle of bodyguards and high-ranking employees” to help carry them out and then cover them^{[8](#)}.

“During this trial you are going to hear about 20 years of the defendant’s crimes. But he didn’t do it alone,”

The prosecutor explained, emphasizing how Combs’s entourage allegedly closed ranks to protect their boss.

At the heart of the prosecution’s case are a series of decadent and disturbing events that Combs himself supposedly engineered.

Johnson spoke of drug-fueled, group-sex parties that Combs allegedly branded “freak offs,” “wild king nights,” or “hotel nights.”

These were no ordinary celebrity escapades, Johnson implied, but carefully choreographed orgies designed to degrade and control women.

She told jurors that Combs would coerce women into drugged-up group sexual encounters with male prostitutes while Combs watched – sometimes filming the acts for his own collection⁹.

His staff, Johnson noted, arranged every detail of these nights: the hotel suites across the U.S. and abroad were outfitted with Combs’s preferred moody lighting, piles of extra linens, and plenty of lubricant to facilitate his lurid demands.¹⁰

According to Johnson, if any woman dared refuse Combs’s wishes or tried to leave early, violence swiftly followed.

He kept his partners and playthings “in line by choking, hitting, kicking and dragging them, often by the hair,” the prosecutor said flatly¹¹.

Johnson’s voice never wavered as she recounted one especially harrowing episode.

Years ago, Combs grew enraged by a suspicion that his longtime girlfriend – R&B singer Cassie (Casandra Ventura) – was being unfaithful.

In response, “he kidnapped one of his employees at gunpoint” to force the man to help track Cassie down, Johnson told the jury¹².

When Combs eventually found her, what followed was a scene of shocking brutality. Johnson described Combs “beating [Cassie]

brutally, kicking her in the back and flinging her around like a rag doll” in a hotel hallway¹³.

Some jurors glanced at Combs, who sat impassively, as the prosecutor recited this allegation of savage domestic violence.

According to Johnson, that 2012 incident was not an isolated outburst of rage but part of a pattern – a pattern in which Combs routinely leveraged fear to maintain dominance over the women in his life.

Johnson revealed that after the hotel beating, Combs terrorized Cassie with a vile threat.

If she ever defied him again, he vowed, he would release intimate videos he’d recorded of her engaged in sex acts with other men – videos she never consented to and which Johnson branded...

“souvenirs of the most humiliating nights of her life.”

The prosecutor let that phrase hang in the air¹⁴.

Cassie’s “livelihood depended on keeping him happy,”

Johnson explained – Combs had made it clear that he could destroy her career and reputation at will¹⁵.

And Cassie, Johnson said, was not the only woman living under such threats.

“That was just the tip of the iceberg,” she stressed, looking each juror in the eye.

Far from an overzealous lover or temperamental celebrity, Combs was portrayed as a serial predator “far from the only time” whose violence, sexual abuse and blackmail were habitual tools of control¹⁶.

Another former girlfriend – identified in court only as “Jane” – would tell a similar story, Johnson previewed.

In 2024, this woman confronted Combs after enduring years of freak offs in dark hotel rooms while he squired other women on glamorous vacations and date nights¹⁷.

Combs’s response, according to Johnson, was to beat Jane mercilessly when she dared to complain about his behavior¹⁸.

By the time the prosecutor finished describing Jane’s allegations, the picture was unmistakably grim: Sean “Diddy” Combs, beloved entertainer, had allegedly spent two decades luring women into a private world of debauchery and degradation, then using terror and humiliation to keep them under his sway.

“Not a Complicated Case”: The Defense’s Rebuttal

After nearly an hour of grim accusations, it was the defense’s turn.

Teny Geragos, Combs’s attorney, stood and faced the jury with a calm, deliberate demeanor. She began by acknowledging the elephant in the room: Sean Combs is a complicated man.

He has his flaws, she conceded – prone to jealousy, given to bad tempers especially when intoxicated on “the wrong drugs”¹⁸.

“But this is not a complicated case,” Geragos quickly pivoted, her tone confident.

"This case is about love, jealousy, infidelity and money."fox5atlanta.com

Whatever salacious stories the prosecutors would tell, she argued, they did not amount to federal crimes.

In Geragos's telling, the government was drastically overreaching - trying to turn tabloid drama into a trafficking conspiracy.

"They're twisting consensual adult relationships into criminal conduct," she said...

Dismissing the charges as an unjustified "overreach" driven by sensational allegations¹⁹.

Geragos urged jurors to block out the circus of celebrity gossip and decades of headlines swirling around her client.

"There has been a tremendous amount of noise around this case over the past year," she said, referring to the intense media scrutiny and speculation.

"It is time to cancel that noise."²⁰

What mattered now, she insisted, were the facts and evidence - not rumors, not prior lawsuits, not anyone's preconceived notions of Diddy.

And the facts, in the defense's view, would show no sex trafficking, no racketeering enterprise - only a man with personal failings that prosecutors were distorting into crimes.

Yes, Combs loved to party, Geragos admitted. Yes, he indulged in a lavish, even "kinky" sex life. But a "party-loving lifestyle" is not a crime,²¹ she argued.

"He's not charged with being mean. He's not charged with being a jerk," Geragos reminded the

jury pointedly[22](#).

Whatever moral judgments one might pass on Combs's behavior, she suggested, those were not the questions before this court.

The defense attorney directly countered the prosecution's most shocking claims one by one.

Take those infamous "freak offs" – the drugged group-sex parties with escorts that Johnson had described in lurid detail.

Geragos did not deny that such events happened.

But she categorically denied that anyone was forced or trafficked. Combs's sexual extravagances, she explained, were part of a consensual swinger lifestyle.

“Combs’ sexual habits were part of a swinger lifestyle involving consenting adults,”

Geragos said, almost conversationally²³. These women were not trembling captives but willing participants, she argued.

Some jurors might personally disapprove of “his kinky sex and his preferences,” Geragos acknowledged, but that was beside the point.

Unconventional or even immoral behavior does not equate to a federal crime.

“Weird is not illegal,” she quipped in so many words. Those sexual predilections, she said, do not equate to sex²⁴.

The prosecution, according to Geragos, was trying to criminalize consent – to turn Combs’s private life into something nefarious when in reality, “no one was trafficked, no one was kidnapped into these situations.”

All the salacious details, she suggested, would likely provoke the jury to think, “I think he’s a jerk and I think he’s kind of mean.”

But, she emphasized again, “being mean is not running a racketeering enterprise”²⁵.

Geragos also addressed the specific incidents that the prosecution had dramatized.

She didn’t shy away from the violent footage the jury would see of Combs attacking Cassie in 2016 – a hotel surveillance tape the judge has allowed as evidence.

In fact, Geragos condemned that behavior herself. The defense was not here to argue that Sean Combs is a saint, she said. Beating up a girlfriend is deplorable.

“Horrible, dehumanizing violence,” Geragos conceded, referring to the video of Combs slamming Cassie in Los Angeles²⁶.

But what does that prove?

“It is not evidence of sex trafficking,” Geragos maintained firmly. “It is evidence of domestic violence.”²⁷

“A terrible mistake, yes – but not the crime he’s charged with.”

In Geragos’s view, prosecutors were cynically conflating personal misconduct with organized criminal activity.

Domestic abuse is not a federal sex-trafficking ring, she insisted, and the jury must not let their disgust at Combs’s temper or attitudes confuse them about the actual charges.

As for the woman known as Jane, Geragos delivered a very different narrative than the prosecution’s.

Yes, Combs and Jane had a turbulent relationship – “toxic and dysfunctional,” in Geragos’s words²⁸.

But Jane was not the brainwashed slave the government implied. She was a grown woman who “willingly engaged” in Combs’s wild sexual adventures because, Geragos argued, she wanted to be with him²⁹.

The defense attorney even flipped the script on the 2024 hotel fight that Johnson had described.

That fight did happen, Geragos said – but Jane started it. It was Jane, in a jealous fury, who first “slammed Combs’ head down” during an argument, Geragos told the court³⁰.

Combs reacted poorly – Geragos did not excuse his lashing out – but she stressed that the incident was a mutual lovers’ quarrel spun out of control, not an example of human trafficking.

“I am not justifying Mr. Combs’ violence,” she assured the jury, “but that fight isn’t evidence of sex trafficking.”³¹

In short, the defense argued, the prosecution was trying to fit a square peg in a round hole: they had taken the messy fragments of Combs’s personal life and tried to hammer them into a sensational criminal narrative that simply isn’t true.

Finally, Geragos turned to motivation – not Combs’s this time, but his accusers’. The jurors, she suggested, should keep an eye on why these stories were emerging.

The answer, Geragos hinted darkly, was money.

She noted that Cassie had filed a civil lawsuit against Combs in 2023 demanding an astounding \$30 million before swiftly settling³².

Another woman, a former business associate, had sued Combs for \$22 million claiming breach of contract³³.

Those lawsuits, Geragos implied, planted the seeds for this criminal case – and they reveal that financial gain is a powerful incentive.

Stepping away from the podium, Geragos left the jury with a pointed rhetorical question echoing in the courtroom:

“I want you to ask yourself, how many millions of reasons does this witness... have to lie?”³⁴

Each juror could fill in the blank.

If the government's key witnesses stood to collect riches or revenge by accusing Sean Combs, how much of their testimony could be trusted?

It was a dramatic flourish to cap the defense opening: a challenge to the jury to scrutinize everything they would hear in the coming weeks.

Judge Subramanian, observing the time, thanked both sides for their statements and addressed the jurors directly.

The first day of trial was drawing to a close, and the judge reminded the panel of their duty.

"Do not discuss this case with anyone," he admonished, instructing them to avoid all media coverage and conversations about the trial³⁵.

The jurors nodded, solemn and wide-eyed from the day's revelations, as they were led out of the courtroom.

The stage was now set. After months of anticipation, Sean "Diddy" Combs's fate will hinge on which version of those opening statements the jury finds closer to the truth – the prosecution's portrait of a monster hiding in plain sight, or the defense's plea that he is guilty of nothing more than being human.

The trial had only just begun, but the battle of narratives was already in full swing.

Until next time,

Anton Volney

Dancer, Writer, Buddhist



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